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### **E-RATE DISCOUNTS FOR MONTANA SCHOOLS & LIBRARIES TOP \$3.6 MILLION**

The funding for E-rate discounts committed to Montana schools and libraries so far this year has already surpassed last year's total. Two hundred fifty-nine Montana libraries and elementary and secondary schools have received word they qualify for \$3.69 million worth of discounted rates for telecommunications services and internet access in the second year of the federal E-rate program, according to the state Public Service Commission.

PSC officials expect this year's E-rate funding for Montana's schools and libraries to top \$4 million when all applications have been considered by the program's administrator, the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company.

Last year, in the program's first year, \$3.62 million worth of discounts was committed to Montana applicants. Nationally, more than \$2.25 billion is available for E-rate discounts this year and \$1.74 billion has been committed by the Schools and Libraries Division to fund telecommunications, internet access and internal connections for eligible applicants.

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 guaranteed discounted rates on telecommunications and internet access for libraries and K-12 schools. The level of E-rate discounts for schools and libraries is based on the area's level of eligibility for the federal free and reduced-price school lunch program. Economically disadvantaged schools and libraries and those located in rural areas receive greater discounts. Most Montana applicants receive discounts of 50 to 90 percent and use them for such items as local and long distance phone service, advanced telecommunications services, internet access, telephone expenses related to distance learning, and internal wiring necessary for access to these telephone services.

According to the PSC, the Schools and Libraries Division is now accepting applications for next year's program. Instructions, forms and deadline information are available on the Schools and Libraries Division's web site at [www.sl.universalservice.org](http://www.sl.universalservice.org).

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